

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) is tackling the impact of high jet fuel prices on aviation. The Congressman participated today in a House Small Business Committee hearing to examine how the air transportation crisis, brought on primarily by rising fuel costs, is damaging the U.S. economy.

“Sky-high fuel costs are forcing airlines to downsize, eliminate destinations, and increase fares,” said Buchanan. “Continental recently blamed rising fuel costs for its decision to stop flying to Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. Our tourism economy would suffer greatly if people can no longer get here.”

Jet fuel is the largest expense for airlines today. This year, passenger and cargo carriers are expected to spend \$61 billion on fuel, up from \$41 billion last year and \$16 billion in 2000. The ripple effects of these increases are translating to higher fares and fees for baggage, seat requests and other amenities.

According to witnesses at today’s hearing, small businesses in the travel and tourism industry are losing revenue as flight delays and the rising costs of air travel make flying too expensive for most Americans, or reduce their travel budgets once they arrive at a destination.

Entrepreneurs that depend on air travel to conduct their business struggle with unreliable service and soaring fares. Employees or business owners may miss meetings and lose out on business opportunities because they cannot find a reliable means of traveling to visit customers in other locales. Higher fares also place small firms on an unlevel playing field with larger competitors that can more easily absorb the costs.

“Safe, reliable, and affordable flights are vital to our local tourist economy,” added Buchanan. “We need a bipartisan effort to lower energy costs. For too long the Democrats and Republicans in Congress have ignored this issue. We need a national energy policy that promotes conservation, invests in alternative fuel and increases drilling to make us less dependent on foreign oil.”